

LESSON 8

Joseph Reveals Himself

I am Joseph, your brother, the one you sold into Egypt. And now don't be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.

— Genesis 45:4–5

Genesis 45 is the morning the hidden brother finally speaks, and his first words name the sin and the God who was working through it, in the same breath.

Introduction

JUDAH HAS STOPPED TALKING.

That is where we left them last week. Eleven men in torn clothes, standing in an Egyptian lord's house before breakfast. One of them has just offered to spend the rest of his life as a slave so his little brother can go home. And the lord, the man they have bowed to on every visit, hasn't said a word.

For twenty-two years this family has lived inside a lie. Ten brothers have carried a secret into every meal and every family gathering. Their father has mourned a son who wasn't dead. And Joseph has spent most of a lifetime in a country that isn't his, first as property, then as a prisoner, finally as the second most powerful man in the world, with no idea whether he would ever see any of them again.¹¹⁹

Genesis 45 is the morning all of that ends.

It ends with a man crying so loudly that people in the next building hear it. It ends with the most frightening sentence the brothers will ever hear, followed by the kindest one. It ends with wagons, new clothes, a warning about fighting on the road, and an old man in Canaan who can't believe his ears.

So, we've been asking: *Can guilty men change?* Previously, we got the answer from Judah. Now, we find out what the brother they wronged does with it.

Send Everyone Away (45:1–3)

Joseph could no longer keep his composure in front of all his attendants, so he called out, "Send everyone away from me!"

He has been holding it in for two trips and the better part of two years. He held it through the spying charge and the three days in custody. He held it through Simeon's chains and the feast. He has held it through Judah's whole speech, every *father* and every *gray hairs*. Now it breaks, and the first thing he does is clear the room.

This belongs to the family. No Egyptian is going to watch what happens next.

No one was with him when he revealed his identity to his brothers. But he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and also Pharaoh's household heard it.

Put that beside the other two times. In 42:24 he turned away so his brothers wouldn't see. In 43:30 he hurried out to a private room and washed his face before he came back. This time there is nowhere to go, and he doesn't try. That is the third weeping, and before this chapter is over there will be a fourth.¹²⁰

Then he says it.

I am Joseph! Is my father still living?

Notice the question. Judah has just spent sixteen verses telling him about their father. The old man is alive, he's grieving, and one more loss will kill him. Joseph asks anyway. It is the question of a son who has been hearing about his father from strangers for two decades and needs to hear it one more time with the masks off.

But they could not answer him because they were terrified in his presence.

Of course they were. Think about what that sentence means to these men. The boy they threw into a cistern is standing in front of them. He has the power of Pharaoh behind him, and he has known exactly who they were the whole time. Every harsh word, every accusation, every night in custody suddenly makes sense. So does the silver in the sacks and the seating chart, and the cup in Benjamin's bag. He has been watching them for two years.

What is he going to do with them now?¹²¹

Come Near Me (45:4–8)

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me," and they came near.

It is the same Hebrew verb we heard at the start of Judah's speech. *Judah approached him* (44:18). Judah came near to plead for his brother's life. Now Joseph calls all of them near, and they come, probably as slowly as eleven frightened men have ever crossed a room.

Then he says it again. *I am Joseph, your brother.*

And then the sentence they've dreaded for twenty-two years. *The one you sold into Egypt.*

He doesn't soften it. He doesn't say *the one you lost*, or *the one who went away*. He names exactly what they did, to their faces, in one clause. If you're waiting for forgiveness that pretends nothing happened, you won't find it in Genesis 45. Joseph says the hard thing first.¹²²

Then, in the very next breath, he says this:

And now don't be grieved or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life.

You were sent home to underline every time Joseph says who sent him to Egypt. Here is the count. *God sent me ahead of you to preserve life* (45:5). *God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land* (45:7). *It was not you who sent me here, but God* (45:8). Three times, and God is the one doing the

sending every time. Then once more, for good measure, in the message to his father: *God has made me lord of all Egypt* (45:9).

Look at what Joseph does with those two verbs. *You sold me. God sent me.* He holds them side by side, and he never lets go of either one. The brothers really did sell him. Joseph just said so. But that was never the whole story, and it was never the most important part. Kidner calls it one of the classic statements of providence in Scripture: a man looking at the worst thing ever done to him and seeing two hands at work in it, and fixing his eyes on the one that mattered.¹²³

This is the first time in fourteen chapters that anybody has said out loud what God was doing.

Go back to Lesson 1. God's name doesn't appear once in Genesis 37. Nobody prays at the cistern. Nobody sees God in the caravan or the slave market. We said then that providence is usually something you see looking backward, and only if you kept walking when the story stopped making sense. Joseph has been walking for twenty-two years. Here, finally, he looks back and says what he sees.

And what he sees is bigger than himself. *The famine has been in the land these two years, and there will be five more years without plowing or harvesting.* A whole family was going to starve. God saw it coming before any of them did, and he sent somebody ahead. Joseph calls it *a great deliverance*.¹²⁴

It cost Joseph a cistern, a slave market, a false charge, and two forgotten years in prison. Genesis doesn't pretend otherwise. But this morning, standing before the men who caused it all, Joseph doesn't talk about what it cost. He talks about who it saved.

Come Down to Me (45:9–15)

Now Joseph is in a hurry. *Return quickly to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me without delay."*

Notice whose name comes first in the message to Jacob. Joseph doesn't lead with himself. The first subject of the first sentence his father will hear from him in twenty-two years is *God*.¹²⁵

Come down to me. There is that word again. Jacob said he would go *down* to Sheol mourning (37:35). His sons went *down* to Egypt for grain. Now the son Jacob mourned is calling him *down* to Egypt, and this time it is toward life.

He has a place picked out. *You can settle in the land of Goshen and be near me.* Goshen is good pasture in the eastern part of the Nile delta, close enough to the court that Joseph can look after them. *There I will sustain you, for there will be five more years of famine.*

Then he points at himself. *Look! Your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin can see that I'm the one speaking to you.* Listen to my voice, he's saying. No interpreter now. It is me.

Then the embrace. *Joseph threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin wept on his shoulder. Joseph kissed each of his brothers as he wept.*

Each of them. Reuben, who tried to save him and failed. Simeon, whom Joseph himself had locked in an Egyptian cell. Judah, who suggested selling him. All ten of them who heard him begging from the bottom of the cistern and sat down to lunch (42:21). He goes down the line and kisses every one.

Then the last sentence of the scene, and it is easy to read right past it. *Afterward his brothers talked with him.*

Go back to the very beginning. *They hated him and could not speak peacefully to him* (37:4). Lesson 1 said there was no peaceful word left in that household. Two lessons ago we watched Joseph ask after their *shalom* when they couldn't speak it to him. Now Genesis uses the same verb from 37:4, and this time there is no *could not* in front of it.

The brothers talk with Joseph.

Twenty-two years, a famine, a cistern, a palace, and a silver cup, and this is what God was building toward. Eleven brothers sitting in a room, talking.¹²⁶

The Best of the Land (45:16–24)

The news gets out fast. *When the news reached Pharaoh's palace, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased.*

Pharaoh goes further than Joseph did. *Get your father and your families, and come back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt. And then: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your dependents and your wives and bring your father here. Do not be concerned about your belongings, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.*

Leave the furniture, Pharaoh says. Just come.

Kidner says a Christian can hardly read this invitation without hearing a greater one. A tired old man near the end of his hope, ten sons weighed down with guilt, and a king who says, *Come, and I will give you the best.*¹²⁷

Then Joseph hands out gifts, and you were told to watch this one. *He gave each of the brothers changes of clothes, but he gave Benjamin three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothes.*

Garments again. This family has been fighting over clothes since chapter 37. A father gave one son a robe, and ten others hated him for it. They stripped it off him, dipped it in goat's blood, and sent it home. Now the brother who lost his robe stands in the courtyard handing out new ones. Every brother gets a set.

And then he does it. Benjamin gets five sets and three hundred pieces of silver. Joseph went for twenty.

He has done this before. In chapter 43 Benjamin's plate came back five times fuller, and the brothers let it go. Here it is again, in front of everybody, the favorite of Rachel getting more than the rest. And Genesis says nothing about any of them objecting. Hughes says: five changes for Benjamin, and nobody cared.¹²⁸

To his father Joseph sends twenty donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, grain and food for the road.

Then, as they're leaving, the most realistic line in the chapter. *Don't argue on the way.*

Joseph knows his brothers. They are about to ride for days with a secret that can't stay hidden much longer. When they get home, someone will have to tell Jacob how Joseph got to Egypt. Who is going to say it? Who will take the blame? *You're the one who wanted to kill him. It was your idea to sell him. Reuben, you said you'd go back for him.* Kidner calls the warning realistic, and it is. Forgiven men can still pick a fight on the road home.¹²⁹

The Wagons (45:25–28)

So they went up from Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan.

Up. For the first time in this whole story, somebody in this family goes *up* from Egypt with good news.

They said, "Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt!" Jacob was stunned, for he did not believe them.

The CSB margin gives the literal sense: *Jacob's heart was numb.* And why would he believe them? These are the men who brought him the bloody robe. They have given him every reason over twenty-two years to doubt anything they tell him. Genesis never says how much they told him that day about the cistern and the caravan. It only says he didn't believe the part about Joseph being alive.¹³⁰

Then two things change his mind. *When they told Jacob all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to transport him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.*

The wagons. Twenty-two years ago these sons handed their father a piece of evidence, and he believed it. *His father recognized it. "It is my son's robe," he said. "A vicious animal has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces!"* (37:33). Now they bring him evidence again, Egyptian wagons sitting in a Canaanite field, and this time the evidence is true.

Revived is the Hebrew verb *to live*. The man who said he'd go down to Sheol mourning for his son comes back to life when he learns his son is alive.

And then the last line of Part Two. *Then Israel said, "Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go to see him before I die."*

Genesis calls him *Israel* here. That is the covenant name. The old man who said *if I am deprived of my sons, then I am deprived* (43:14) is Israel again, and he is going down to Egypt.

He said for twenty-two years that he would go down to his son. He was right. Only it won't be Sheol.¹³¹

Looking to Christ

Joseph's speech in Genesis 45 sounds like something you'll hear again, centuries later, from a fisherman.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stands before a crowd in Jerusalem, in the same city where Jesus was crucified a few weeks before. He tells them exactly what they did. *Though he was delivered up according to*

God's determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him (Acts 2:23).

Hold that beside Genesis 45. *You sold me. God sent me.* Peter says the same two things at the same time. They did it. God planned it. Neither one cancels the other.

Then Peter finishes his sermon with a sentence that sounds very much like the message Joseph sent home to Jacob. Joseph said, *God has made me lord of all Egypt (45:9)*. Peter said, *God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36)*.

The brother you rejected has been made lord. That is terrifying news, and it was terrifying for Joseph's brothers too. The crowd at Pentecost was *pierced to the heart* and asked, *Brothers, what should we do?* (Acts 2:37).

Peter answered with an invitation. *Repent and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2:38)*. Joseph's first words to his frightened brothers were an invitation too. *Please, come near me.*¹³²

Don't press every detail. Joseph's brothers didn't kill him, and Joseph could only forgive what was done to Joseph. But the shape is unmistakable. The rejected one becomes the rescuer, and when he finally reveals himself, his first words to the guilty are an invitation.

Applying the Text

Name the wrong, then release it. *The one you sold into Egypt.* Joseph didn't forgive by pretending nothing happened. He named what they did, then let it go. Real forgiveness can look a sin in the face. If you have to pretend it wasn't that bad before you can forgive it, you haven't forgiven it yet.

Look for the second hand. *You sold me. God sent me.* Joseph saw both. Most of us can only see the first one when we've been hurt. Ask God to show you, maybe not today, but eventually, what he was doing in the worst thing that ever happened to you. It may take years. It took Joseph twenty-two.

Don't make the guilty grovel. Joseph's brothers were terrified. He could have let them sweat. Instead he called them near and told them not to be angry with themselves. When someone who has wronged you finally comes back, your job is not to make them pay for coming back.

Expect old arguments on the road home. *Don't argue on the way.* Reconciliation doesn't end every fight. Families that have been forgiven still have to ride home together. Watch your mouth on the trip, especially about who was most to blame.

Let the evidence revive you. Jacob didn't believe his sons. He believed the wagons. Some of us are like that. If you've been numb for years, look at what God has actually sent. The wagons are often sitting right in the field.

For Discussion

1. In 45:4 Joseph says *the one you sold into Egypt*, and in 45:5 he tells them not to be angry with themselves. Why do you think he said both? What would be lost if he'd left out either one?

2. Read 45:5–9 and list everything Joseph says God did. How does that list change the way the brothers' sin looks? Does it make their sin any less wrong?
3. Compare 37:4 with 45:15. What has changed in this family between those two verses? What did it cost?
4. Why do you think Joseph warns his brothers not to argue on the way home (45:24)? What would they have argued about?
5. Is there something someone did to you that you've never been able to see God's hand in? What would it take for you to say *you sold me, but God sent me* about it?
6. Jacob was numb with unbelief until he saw the wagons (45:26–27). What is something God has done in your life that you've had trouble believing? What evidence has he already sent?

Looking Ahead

Lesson 9: Moving to Egypt (Genesis 46)

Part Three begins. An old man packs up everything he owns and heads south. He stops at Beersheba to worship, and God speaks to him at night. Then a father who has mourned his son for twenty-two years finally sees his face.

Before you come: read Genesis 46. Find the promise God makes to Jacob about going *down* to Egypt and coming *up* again (46:3–4). Then find the next time Joseph weeps, and notice how long it lasts.

¹¹⁹ Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. On 45:6 he works the arithmetic to twenty-two years between the dream and Joseph's disclosure. Kidner, *Genesis*. On 41:46 he notes that the story began when Joseph was seventeen (37:2) and reaches its climax nine years after he entered Pharaoh's service (45:6), more than twenty years after the first breach with his brothers.

¹²⁰ The CSB margin on 45:1 gives the literal sense as *all those standing about him*. Smith, *Pentateuch*. On 45:1–2 he notes that the weeping was so loud that the Egyptians heard it and reported it to Pharaoh. Hughes, *Genesis*. In his summary at the opening of chapter 45 he notes the two earlier breakdowns (42:24; 43:30).

¹²¹ Kidner, *Genesis*. On 45:3 he observes that Joseph's question, coming after all Judah had said, shows that *to live* in the Old Testament tends to include the idea of health and well-being, as in 45:27, where *revived* is literally *lived*. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. On 45:3 they describe the brothers' terror at the revelation and the question of whether Joseph would take revenge. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 45:3 he notes that Judah's repeated mentions of their father had so gripped Joseph that his question was more an exclamation than an inquiry.

¹²² The verb behind *come near* in 45:4 is *nāgaš*, the same verb used for Judah's approach in 44:18. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 45:4 he observes that Joseph's clarification, *whom you sold*, while meant to comfort, must have increased their fear. Borthwick, *Life of Joseph*. On 45:3–4 he suggests the brothers were so stunned that Joseph had to repeat his announcement.

¹²³ Kidner, *Genesis*. On 45:5 he calls *you sold me . . . God sent me* one of the classic statements of providential control, seeing the two aspects of every event and fixing attention on the will of God as alone of consequence, and he compares Jesus's acceptance of his betrayal in Gethsemane (John 18:11; cf. Acts 2:23; 4:28; Romans 8:28). On 45:1–15 he calls this certainty the secret of Joseph's astonishing lack of rancor. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 45:5–9 he counts four references to God in Joseph's speech (45:5, 7, 8, 9) and notes the absence of any reproach.

¹²⁴ Kidner, *Genesis*. On 45:7 he notes that *a remnant* and *a great deliverance* emphasize the peril the family had escaped, one of the Old Testament's many crises of judgment and salvation. The CSB margin on 45:7 offers the alternative *keep alive for you many survivors*. On 45:8 Kidner identifies *a father to Pharaoh* as a recognized title of viziers and high officials, which Vergote interprets as virtually *king's adviser*.

¹²⁵ Kidner, *Genesis*. On 45:9 he notes that God is the subject of Joseph's first sentence to his father. On 45:10 he places Goshen in the eastern part of the Nile delta, citing 47:11 for its later name, *the land of Rameses*. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 45:9–13 he observes that Joseph's charge to his brothers begins and ends with the command to hurry.

¹²⁶ The CSB margin on 45:15 gives the literal sense as *he wept over them*. The verb *talked* in 45:15 is *dābar*, the same verb in 37:4, where the brothers could not speak peacefully to Joseph. Hughes, *Genesis*. On 45:14–15 he stresses that the reconciliation embraced all eleven brothers. Grigoni et al., *Joseph*. On 45:14–15 they note that Joseph embraced Benjamin first and then each brother in turn.

¹²⁷ Kidner, *Genesis*. On 45:16–28 he says that this royal invitation, for Joseph's sake, to an Israel near the end of hope and to ten brothers burdened with guilt, can hardly fail to remind the Christian of the divine *come . . . and I will give* (cf. 45:18), and