

## **Two Essential Keys to Reconciliation**

Genesis 43:1-45:15

### **Introduction**

What is, perhaps, the most difficult question to ask? “Will you forgive me?” It requires a humility that admits you were wrong....a vulnerability that gives up all control because you don’t know if they will forgive you. It’s a really tough question to ask.

But perhaps equally vulnerable and humble and difficult is the response: “I forgive you.” Depending on the degree of the injustice against you, it can feel almost impossible/unimaginable to grant forgiveness.

Both are required for reconciliation. True repentance AND forgiveness are essential keys to reconciliation. When the signs of genuine repentance/change in the heart are there, what will fuel your forgiveness? Let’s answer that question as we continue the story of Joseph and his brothers in Genesis.

We pick up in ch43 when 10 of Joseph's brothers make it back to Canaan after buying food in Egypt during this worldwide famine. But Joseph, presenting himself as a ruthless Egyptian prince, kept Simeon behind while the other brothers go get Benjamin, Joseph's brother of the same mother.

Joseph is testing his brothers: Will they go back for Simeon, or will they care only about themselves, like they did 22yrs ago when they sold him into slavery? Consider first...

### **The Signs of True Repentance**

What are some possible indicators that Joseph's brothers have truly change?

***Sign #1: A change from self-focus to self-sacrifice.*** [43:1-2] Remember, Jacob was completely unwilling for them to go back to Egypt because he knew the only way they were allowed to go back was if they brought Benjamin. But Jacob favors Benjamin, like he did Joseph, because they are the sons of his favorite wife Rachel.

BUT the severity of the famine forces his hand. He says, “Go buy a *little* food.” Like, “Maybe you can just grab a little bit and that Egyptian prince won’t mind if you don’t bring back Benjamin.” But Judah knows better. **[vv3-5]**

Notice: Judah speaks up. He speaks up a lot in this story. That’s important because he was the one who led his brothers to sell Joseph in the first place. Has he changed? Let’s see.

**[vv6-7]** They’re not wrong, but they’re also not providing a solution. They’re more concerned about not getting blamed for something they didn’t intend. But Judah is different. **[vv8-10]**

Notice his faith! “I intend to bring him back!” Sounds like a changed man. Think of how different he is than when he sacrificed Joseph for a few bucks, but now he sacrifices himself. “I’ll bear the blame. I *pledge* his safety.”

That’s the same word used in ch38 when he gave Tamar (whom he thought was a prostitute) a *pledge* to pay for her services:

signet, cord, staff. That pledge was for selfish pleasure; the pledge now is selfless sacrifice.

What is so remarkable about Judah's pledge of self-sacrifice is that it doesn't appear Jacob has changed in his toxic parenting. He clearly favors Benjamin more than he does his other sons, just like he favored Joseph...the very thing that ticked his brothers off 22 years ago.

But now, Judah doesn't care about that. He cares about preserving his family from a famine and protecting the favored son, Benjamin. **[vv11-14]**

Ironically, these gifts Jacob tells them to appease the Egyptian prince (who is really his son, Joseph) are similar to what the caravan of Ishmaelites, who took Joseph into slavery, were carrying. It's likely those Ishmaelites gave Joseph's brothers gum, balm, and myrrh in exchange for Joseph to be sent to Egypt. And now they're bring back the same stuff TO JOSEPH in Egypt.

So Jacob resigns Benjamin to Judah's care, still in a self-pity-favoritism kind of way: "If I'm bereaved of my children, then I'm bereaved." As if Benjamin is his only child! Wouldn't that have triggered the brothers? "Our dad is no different! It's the same kind of favoritism he showed Joseph!"

Are they gonna protect Benjamin, or will they do the same thing to him as they did to Joseph? **[v15]** This 2-week, 250mile journey is described in one verse. Clearly, what Moses wants to highlight is what happens when the brothers arrive because what happens reveals whether they have truly changed.

***Sign #2: A change from self-protecting deceit to self-risking honesty.*** **[v16]** Joseph sees them from afar, kind of like in ch37 they saw Joseph from afar in Dothan. But they made plans to harm him AND they killed an animal to use its blood to make it look like Joseph was slaughtered. But here, Joseph makes plans to slaughter an animal to give them a feast. **[vv17-18]**

Fear can be irrational sometimes! “Seize our donkeys”? The second most powerful man in the world doesn’t need more donkeys. Maybe they think he wants to steal their form of transportation so they can’t flee? I don’t know, but they are freaking out because it’s not normal for foreigners like this to be invited into the home of a prince.

But notice their self-risking honesty. **[vv19-22]** This is so different than what they did in ch37 when they pocketed the silver with which they sold Joseph into slavery. Now, when they have another chance to do the same—they could’ve kept the money that was put back in their sacks (in ch42) and not said anything, but they didn’t...because they’ve changed!

Such honesty is a huge risk! What will Joseph’s steward do to them when he hears their confession? **[v23a]** “Peace to you...” *Shalom*...used 4x in ch43. It was used in 37 to describe the lack of peace Joseph’s brothers felt towards him because they were so jealous of the favoritism their dad showed him.

But now, they hear from Joseph's steward a word of *peace*, raising the question: Is there peace between them and Joseph? Can there be, after what they did? What the steward does next highlights that peace is possible.

**[v23b]** Remember, Simeon has been in custody for months. Joseph has been waiting to see if they would come back for him. And they did! **[vv24-25]**

So they're just waiting for this Egyptian prince to come home so they can see whether their gifts, including Benjamin, will appease him. When he comes home, another sign of change in the brothers is seen.

***Sign #3: A change from selfish jealousy to selfless rejoicing.*** **[v26]** Now the dream from ch37 is fully fulfilled because all 11 brothers are bowing. **[vv27-28]** And while their heads are bowed, notice who he sees. **[vv29-30]**

He loses it. Wouldn't you? 22 years of not seeing your brother from the same mother who already died. But he still doesn't want them to know who he is because he's not

totally sure they've changed. That's why he runs to another room to cry, and that's why he's about to do what he's about to do.

**[vv31-32]** It seems they're just at separate tables, not in separate rooms. So Joseph is still able to observe whether they've changed. Notice this next test. **[v33]**

They're amazed because this Egyptian prince "randomly" sat them according to their birth order—youngest to oldest. There's no way could he know this! What a strange coincidence! But of course, it wasn't a coincidence. Joseph did it on purpose to highlight what he does next. **[v34a]**

Clearly, this Egyptian prince favors the youngest brother. That's definitely gonna trigger the same hate-filled jealousy the brothers felt towards Joseph in ch37 when he, their younger brother, was favored...right? Will it? Or have they changed? **[v34b]**

They're all happy! No one cares that Benjamin got more food. They're just enjoying each

other. There's been a change from selfish jealousy to selfless rejoicing.

**Sign #4: A change from concern only for the welfare of self to concern for the welfare of others. [44:1-2]** Another test is coming. A silver cup is put in Benjamin's sack. Why? **[vv3-5]** Why is Joseph setting them up like this? It's no different than previous tests—he wants to see if they've truly changed. When the silver cup is found in Benjamin's sack, will the brothers care? Will they let Benjamin, the youngest favored brother, be taken captive, just like they let Joseph be taken captive?

**[vv6-8]** In other words, “Why would we steal more money when we already brought back the extra money that was given us before?” Then notice the dreadful statement they make in **[v9]**. They're so confident no one took it that they say, “The one who has the cup, you can kill him, and make the rest of us slaves.”

The steward lightens the penalty but sharpens the test by saying the penalty will be inflicted only on the one who possesses the cup. **[v10]**

Now, notice how Moses builds suspense as the steward searches for the cup. **[vv11-12a]** You can visualize it: each guy, one-by-one, lowers his sack. The steward carefully checks each sack, starting with Rueben, the eldest, then to Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun...and finally, Benjamin's sack is opened. **[v12b]**

The penalty is only for the one in whose sack the cup is found! And the brothers could just let Benjamin be taken and they could go on their way and make up another story to their dad like they did with Joseph. But are they still concerned only for their own welfare? **[v13]**

They do the same thing Jacob did when he heard the fake news that Joseph was killed by an animal. They're mourning at the apparent loss of Benjamin. AND instead of mourning and then going back to Canaan (which is what they could've done!), they ALL go with Benjamin back to Egypt!

Now...notice this detail. **[v14]** Why mention Judah? Why not say, "When all the brothers

came...”? Why say, “When JUDAH and his brothers came...”? What’s going on? Judah was the one who pledged protection of Benjamin to Jacob. And that’s shocking because Judah was also the one who LED his brothers to sell Joseph. Judah is highlighted because, if Judah is repentant, then surely all of them are! **[vv15-16]**

Judah isn’t confessing guilt over the cup. He’s confessing guilt over what he and his brothers did to Joseph 22yrs ago, and the cup is recompense for that. Joseph keeps pressing. **[v17]** Could they? Would their hearts be at peace leaving Benjamin behind?

In response to this offer, Judah gives the longest recorded speech in Genesis. Listen to his heart. **[v18a, “went up”]** That’s bold! He got up from his prostrate position and approached this prince of Egypt. What a risk!

**[vv18-34]** What a change! This is a man who couldn’t care less about his father before, and yet, in this speech, he mentions his dad 14x.

This is man who was very quick to sacrifice his younger favored brother, but here, he says in vv33, “Please let me remain *instead of* the boy.” That term *instead of* is the same term used in Gen. 22 when a ram was offered as a burnt offering *instead of* Isaac.

Judah is emerging as the kind of leader God’s people need—a self-sacrificing leader who’s willing to give up his own life for the preservation of his people.

It’s no wonder, in Gen. 49, it is prophesied that through Judah’s lineage would come the Messiah—the leader/king of God’s people who would preserve life for his people through his own sacrifice. **[GOSPEL]**

Judah’s willing self-sacrifice is a pointer to Christ and it shows that he, along with his brothers have changed. And Joseph now fully sees it. And he’s ready to forgive. But how could he! They did him so wrong! Just because someone is truly sorry for what they did isn’t enough to compel us to truly forgive them, is it? So what is...

## The Key to True Forgiveness

Let's see what it is for Joseph. **[45:1]** He's still speaking in Egyptian at this point. So he tells all his Egyptian servants to leave the room. And then, he just loses it again...for the third time, but now *in front of* his brothers. **[v2]**

His weeping is reaching the ears of those in other parts of Pharaoh's palace. And you can imagine how confused and weirded out his brothers are. "What's this dude's problem? What is going on?" And that's when the big reveal comes. **[v3, "said" = in Hebrew]**

"Dismayed" is a word that means "paralyzed with fear." Jaws dropped, eyes wide open, stiff as boards. Total shock. Joseph jolts them out of their paralysis. **[v4]**

"I'm not your lord/master. I'm your brother." And then he comforts them. **[v5]** Is that a contradiction? "YOU sold me here, but GOD sent me before you." This is pure biblical logic. The brothers are TOTALLY responsible for selling Joseph. Nothing forced them to do what they did. It was wicked; it was sinful...

BUT, simultaneously in that same event, GOD was working. HE ultimately was the one who sent Joseph to Egypt...WHY? To preserve life. Their intent was wicked in that act, but God's intent *in that same act* was good. **[vv6-8a]**

That is remarkable. Joseph is clinging to the exhaustive, meticulous, absolute sovereignty of God, even over the free but wicked acts of his brothers. He knows God's promise given to his great grandfather Abraham to make his offspring numerous, and therefore, if Joseph had not been sold by his brothers to Egypt in the first place, the people of Israel would've gone extinct, and so would God's promise!

So he clings to the exhaustive, meticulous, absolute sovereignty of God over all things. And I would propose...THAT is the key to forgiveness. How can you truly forgive someone if you think it what they did to you was just purposeless evil? When you believe God good purposes in it, you're free to forgive.

Which means, you no longer hold a punishment over them. **[vv8b-11]**

This would be another big test for his brothers! They gotta go back and tell their dad that Joseph is still alive, which means, they gotta tell him they lied to him all those years before!

But Joseph wants them to bring him, and all the rest of the people of Israel, down to Egypt so they don't die from the famine, because there's still five years left (which, ironically, Joseph seems to think that the people of Israel will only stay in Egypt until that famine ends in five years; he has no clue they'll be there for another 400 years!). **[vv12-13]**

Now, the camera still hasn't panned back to the brothers yet. The focus has been on this long speech of forgiveness rooted in God's sovereignty given by Joseph, but last we saw of the brothers, they were in utter shock. How are they responding to Joseph's offer of forgiveness and provision? **[vv14-15]**

Don't miss how huge that statement is: "his brothers talked with him." Ch37:4 says, "they hated him and *could not speak* peacefully to him." Now, they're talking to each other.

## **Conclusion**

Oh may this happen with someone in your life. ...someone with whom you long to have true reconciliation. It can only happen when there is true repentance AND then that transactional forgiveness can take place.

But you should forgive a person even if they don't repent; you forgive them in your heart before God. But you don't verbally grant forgiveness until they repent.

But even if they repent, how can you truly forgive? How will you be able to utter some of the hardest words in the English language, "I forgive you," especially when what they did was so awful?

First, let your heart be softened by this truth: Remember how much you've been forgiven by God. You will never have to forgive someone more than what God has forgiven you.

But then, believe in the sovereignty of God, even over their sin against you. And that will free you to truly forgive.